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U.S. Office of Civilian
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The block plan of
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Washington, D.C.

1942

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THE BLOCK PLAN OF ORGANIZATION FOR CIVILIAN WAR SERVICES

September 1942

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF CIVILIAN DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C.

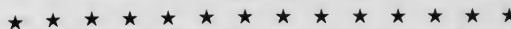


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THIS WAR might conceivably be lost by a few persons, but it cannot be won by a few. It can be won only by the united efforts of all—whether on the fighting front, in the factories of the production front, or in the homes of the community front. One of the best means to secure complete mobilization on this home front—to take every individual and every household into the community war effort—is the block plan. This plan has already been developed successfully in cities in various parts of the country. For the benefit of defense councils in those communities which have not yet instituted this system, the essentials of the plan are presented here, together with suggestions based upon the experience of cities which have used it.



THE BLOCK PLAN

OF ORGANIZATION FOR CIVILIAN WAR SERVICES

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WHAT IS THE BLOCK PLAN?

The block plan is a plan of organization established to assure total coverage of all households for civilian war services. Civilian war services are all those civilian activities, other than protection, with which communities and individuals must be concerned as part of their contribution to the prosecution of the war. They include salvage, transportation, war savings, services for service men, recreation, consumer interests, nutrition, health and medical care, welfare and child care, housing, education, agriculture, labor supply and training, and plant utilization.

As the name suggests, the block plan is set up on a geographic basis, and in some cities, the actual city block is the unit of organization. In

other cities, election precincts, census enumeration districts, or natural neighborhood areas have been used. In communities which have a well-organized air-raid warden service, the block plan follows the same area patterns, to avoid confusion.

In many rural areas a similar neighborhood leader plan has already been developed with the assistance of the Extension Service. The suggested organization for the block plan outlined in this pamphlet is directed primarily to communities of 2,500 or more people. In rural areas, the neighborhood leader plan should be related to the Defense Council in a manner similar to that suggested in this pamphlet.

Various titles have been used by cities to designate the block plan workers—Block Captains, Victory Aides and Liberty Belles among others. The OCD suggests the title, Block Leader. All block or neighborhood leaders are eligible for membership in the United States Citizens Service Corps. Both men and women may be used as block leaders.

PURPOSE OF THE BLOCK PLAN

Many of the programs and activities developed by the civilian war services branch of the local defense council depend for success upon the direct cooperation of all households in the community. These programs are described in the *Organization Outline for Local Defense Councils*, a publication of the United States Office of Civilian Defense.

The best way to secure community understanding and support is through direct personal contact with each householder or family head. Direct contact provides the opportunity for discussion of the reasons for a particular campaign, its relation to the war, and the part which individuals or families can play. After good general publicity has launched a particular campaign, personal contact is essential for complete coverage, and for translating the purpose of the campaign into terms of the individual home or person.

Obviously, not every committee of the defense council can establish its own separate organization to reach all the people for each program that comes along. Such a procedure would be wasteful of our volunteer resources in man power, and would be confusing to the public. The block plan is designed, therefore, to carry to the people a variety of programs which are developed and sponsored by the respective program committees of the defense council.

It may be used at one time for the execution of a salvage campaign, planned and supervised by the salvage committee, at another for a house-to-house campaign sponsored by the war savings committee of the council. It may be used to carry vital nutrition information to

every home, and to promote the more extensive use of certain foods which the necessities of war may require us to use in greater quantities, in place of other foods to which we have been accustomed. Block Leaders can bring to every family essential information about rationing and price control, and their relationship to our war effort, and they can assist in the promotion of car sharing and the conservation of our meager rubber supply.

The block plan may also be used to collect information necessary to the intelligent planning of the community's war program. Surveys by Block Leaders can determine the number of spare rooms available for incoming war workers, the number of children whose mothers are employed and who therefore require some form of day care, and the number of children, mothers, and aged and infirm persons who would have to be provided for in the event of evacuation.

The Block Leaders can also make surveys to determine the number of women available for training and placement in war industries, or the number of people available for emergency farm labor, when such information is requested by appropriate council committees. The block plan can also be a powerful stimulant to aid in recruiting volunteer civilian workers for the local Civilian Defense Volunteer Office.

Another objective of the block plan is to carry back to the community war leaders the opinions of the people regarding specific phases of the war effort, thus apprising the leaders of a situation or trend which needs to be corrected or encouraged.

The block leader can help in educating the community in the meaning of our war effort. In the course of his conversation with the family, many questions will be asked which the block leader may not be equipped to answer. He can relay these questions to proper authorities, however, and then bring back to the family the best available information. In this work, he will be helping himself almost as much as he helps his neighbors.

The block plan has one other major objective—the encouragement of a clearer understanding by all the people of the reasons behind our civilian war efforts, and the development of a neighborly spirit of co-operation for war service. The block plan not only offers a method to reach all families in the community, but it also provides a means for bringing neighbors together for the purpose of discussion and common understanding of our common duties as civilians in this war.

These activities suggest some of the many ways in which the block plan can be used by an alert and aggressive defense council to carry out the varied program of civilian war services.

To summarize, the purposes of the block plan are:

1. To carry forward civilian war activity, quickly and effectively.

2. To get vital war information into every home, rapidly and accurately.

3. To collect information which may be needed for community war planning, and to bring back to the homes answers to questions which have been raised.

4. To promote a spirit of cooperation in neighborhood enterprises, such as block discussion meetings, rallies, car-sharing plans, the sharing of scarce mechanical and household equipment, and any other activity of the community's war services.

ORGANIZING THE BLOCK PLAN

Organization is a means, not an end. Its purpose is to get things done. There are different ways of doing things; one way will fit better into one community, another into another community. Already there are several different plans of block organization in this country. As a result of local conditions and local attitudes, Chicago, Minneapolis, Syracuse, Detroit, San Diego, and other cities operate in various ways. Here is a proposed plan of organization based upon the strengths and weaknesses of these and other block plans which have been developed by defense councils around the country. It is recognized that variations can and should be made to meet local needs and local conditions. Moreover, it is not suggested that communities which now have block plans should reorganize them if they are already adequately fulfilling the purposes outlined above.

Since the block system is designed to implement all of the civilian war services committees of the council, it is important that the Chief of the Block Leader Service be in close touch with these various committees. Therefore, in communities where a civilian war services executive committee (composed of the chairmen of the council war services committees) is organized, the Chief of the Block Leader Service should serve as a member. In smaller communities, the executive of the Citizens Service Corps, who acts as the chairman of the civilian war services executive committee, may himself serve as the head of the block organization. In larger communities it will be preferable to appoint someone else to assume this responsibility. In areas where no executive committee for civilian war services exists, and the chairmen of the various committees are represented directly on the defense council, the Chief of the Block Leader Service should serve on the council itself.

As stated earlier, in communities where the air raid warden service is well organized, the block organization for civilian war services should follow the same area pattern and use the same district designations to avoid confusion and improve coordination. It is highly important

that these two civilian war units work together with complete harmony and in the closest possible cooperation. In some communities daytime air-raid wardens have been used as block leaders. If such a plan is followed it should be made clear that the block leaders will work directly under the civilian war services branch, in carrying out civilian war programs.

The first and probably the most difficult part of the geographical unit organization is setting it up. The secret of working out this plan easily and quickly lies in division of responsibility. The use of the geographical areas of the air-raid warden service makes this division much easier, since the community is already divided into zones and subdivided into sectors. Sectors normally include about 500 persons or approximately 120 families. In smaller communities the zone unit is unnecessary and sector leaders report directly to the Chief of the service.

The problem of organization involves, therefore, the designation of (1) zone leaders, (2) sector leaders, and (3) the block leaders who work with individual families as assistants to the sector leader.

Great care should be taken to appoint zone and sector leaders who have organizational and administrative ability. In some instances the zone air-raid warden chief may be able to make useful suggestions concerning these appointments. In other instances the Civilian Defense Volunteer Office may be of help. After zone leaders are appointed, each zone leader should be made responsible for the development of the sector organization within his zone.

Sector leaders are in turn responsible for securing and organizing the block leaders within their sectors. Upon sector and block leaders depend the practical results of block organization since these are the people who will be in direct contact with the families of their neighborhood.

It is important, therefore, that sector leaders should be acceptable to their neighbors, and regarded by their neighbors as possessing the necessary qualities of leadership. Experience in some cities has shown that the most satisfactory sector leader is one who is elected by the residents of his area. This democratic procedure has the advantage of preventing charges of favoritism or discrimination, and providing the block leader with the incentive to live up to the confidence expressed in him.

The senior air-raid warden of the sector or some other person designated by the zone leader can arrange an election by calling a meeting of the residents of the district. At this meeting the purposes of the block organization can be outlined, discussion invited, and the group can proceed to elect the sector leader. The elective system is not the only one in use. In some communities the sector leader has

This chart shows the organization of the block plan for Civilian War Services. It does NOT show the organization for Civilian Protection.

[illegible]

Following the selection of the sector leader, the organization can be completed by the appointment of block leaders who will serve as assistants to the sector leader. Each block leader can be given the responsibility of working with about ten families. The block leaders, appointed by the sector leader, serve with him as a sector committee and assume responsibility for all tasks assigned to the sector through the block organization. The sector leader acts as chairman and administrator. Each of the block leaders is chosen from the families with whom he works, and the same block leader keeps in touch with these particular families thereafter.

The whole organization should be kept flexible, and ready to do an effective and speedy job on the various projects undertaken. Zonal or sector leaders should be called together by the Chief of the Block Leader Service as frequently as necessary, to help in determining the plans by which projects are to be carried out. The sector leaders and their committees should have enough freedom to work out their jobs in ways which fit their situations best. The whole organization will improve with experience, and the members will find that friendly and mutual criticism will benefit everyone concerned.

DIVISION OF RESPONSIBILITY OF BLOCK LEADERS

Experience has shown that the enthusiasm of block leaders may be increased by assigning the sector responsibility for one or more particular war programs to each block leader. In making these assignments it is of course wise to consider the natural interests and aptitudes of the individual block leader. Thus Mrs. Hoffman, who has been actively interested in the consumer program sponsored by the labor union auxiliary, will be the logical person to select to promote the program of consumer interests. Northrop, the lawyer whose hobby is his vegetable garden, will take personal pride in the Victory Garden campaign. Similarly the programs of salvage, transportation, child

care, nutrition, or war savings will have their peculiar appeals for other leaders. Special aptitudes and interests notwithstanding, the sector leader will almost certainly find it wise to divide up the sector responsibility for particular programs among his block leaders.

When the sector leader has made his individual program assignments, the appropriate block leader will be expected to attend any zone or city-wide meeting which is called for discussion of his specialty. The sector leader will also route to this leader for his study and development any instructional material for the sector relating to that particular subject. Later, at a sector committee meeting, this block leader will explain the program to his fellow block leaders, each of whom in turn is responsible for carrying the program to the families in his assigned territory.

TRAINING SECTOR AND BLOCK LEADERS

The best block leader is the leader who best understands the war and who sees most clearly the relationship between the war and the services which he is promoting in his community. To increase this understanding, each sector and block leader should take the general orientation course recommended for all members of the United States Citizens Service Corps. This is a course to explain in detail the meaning of total war, the impact of war on the community, the defense council as a unit for mobilizing community resources including manpower, and the regulations and activities of the Citizens Defense Corps and the Citizens Service Corps. In addition, instructions should be given as to the techniques of democratic leadership and participation, the general duties and responsibilities of block leaders, and the organizational plan of the block system. After this basic training is completed, block leaders will need to receive detailed and precise instruction concerning each individual project as it comes along, the reasons for it, and the contribution each family and person is making to the war effort by supporting it.

The training of the block leaders is the most crucial part in the whole plan. If it is well done so that the leaders are enthusiastic and convinced of the importance of the projects they undertake, the cooperation of the households of the community will be assured.

THE BLOCK PLAN IN ACTION

The defense council is the general staff of civilian defense. It plans the strategy of the battle—decides on which front to launch the next attack. The block leaders are our line officers, the men of action who lead the volunteer soldiers in the prosecution of the campaign, once the front is decided upon.

Let us suppose that strategy calls this week for the dissemination of information on price control and the responsibility of the consumer in maintaining price ceilings. The consumer committee of the council has carefully worked out the material to be distributed. It has assigned an expert to attend zone or sector meetings and explain the plan of attack to the block leaders.

At these zone or sector meetings, where the "staff officer" explains the campaign to the "line officers," the staff officer will first make clear the fundamental issues involved, explaining the dangers of inflation and its causes, so that the line officers will see the necessity for the campaign. He will then explain the program in detail and indicate precisely what the sector and block leaders are expected to do.

The campaign is launched through radio and press. The informational campaign provides the meat of fact which strengthens the democratic will of our people to act. Feature articles and radio skits dramatize the importance of the program. Then, when block leaders visit every home, this job of making further explanations, answering questions, and enlisting the total cooperation of the community in this campaign on the home front is greatly simplified.

The reverse action of the block plan is just as important. Through the information and problems that the block leaders bring back to the civilian war services committees their programs can be adapted to local needs.

Here are three general guides with respect to specific projects, based upon actual experience.

1. It is essential to make the fundamental issues and the connection between the project and the community war program very clear to the personnel of the block organization before they can be expected to make these points clear to the families with which they deal. Remember that the block organization is a cross section of the community itself.

2. It is important before undertaking the project to call a representative from each sector to a meeting at which the entire project is outlined. Such meetings might be held for the city as a whole or separate meetings may be held for each zone or even for each sector. A well planned and organized meeting, with opportunity for questions, will get the idea across much better than written instructions, particularly if this is the first time that a project in this field is being undertaken.

3. If possible, place explanatory written material about the project in the hands of the sector personnel after they have attended the instructional meeting so that they may study it further and have something specific to discuss with the block leaders.

REPORTS

In order to know the effectiveness with which the block organization is functioning, it is essential that the head of the organization and the defense council have definitive reports on work actually accomplished. A system of reports from the sector to the zone to the chief of the Block Leader Service should be required on each project.

These reports should indicate precisely how many of the families within the area were visited and the results obtained—if the project is of such a character that reports may be obtained on this latter point. Specific deadlines for the filing of reports should be established and strictly adhered to. A space for comments about the effectiveness of the project and its reception by the families visited should usually be included.

Some communities have found it desirable to take a public opinion survey through a sampling process to determine the effectiveness of various projects. A few able observers selected from the organization may be asked to comment on the entire program. Statistical summaries of consumption of foods or collection of salvage may also be compiled.

MAINTAINING INTEREST AND ENTHUSIASM

The secret of high morale is action, action, and more action. The more records broken, the more conquests made, the more territory occupied, the greater the esprit de corps.

Salvage of critical materials, such as rubber, tin, and fats, is no longer a sporadic campaign but a continuous drive. Transportation, child care, housing, consumer interests, and aid to men in the armed forces are also continuous programs. The block which is week by week bringing these war services nearer to perfection will have high morale.

The greatest incentive to continued interest and enthusiasm on the part of the personnel of the block organization will arise out of the basic satisfaction which these volunteers will derive from doing an important job which is clearly related to the winning of the war.

Every method should be used to maintain a high morale among the total organization. Publicity about the accomplishments of the organization, its individual sectors and personnel, is one real means of maintaining an effective organization. Inspirational rallies or mass meetings of the entire personnel with speakers, entertainment and war films are sure to be stimulating. A news letter or bulletin issued regularly to all personnel has also been very effective in maintaining good organization. One large city publishes a weekly newspaper which goes to all members of its block organization.

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